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The Changing Face of Drink: Substance, Imagery, and Behaviour

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Temperance from Below: The Birth of a "Counter-Culture"

SIDSEL ERIKSEN*

A study of the Thisted Abstinence Society indicates that the old temperance movement in Denmark was an organization of socially vulnerable people. The author explains how the "middle-class" character of temperance ideology developed as an ambitious strategy for its members' own survival in the modern society — a strategy which formed the background for the ideas of prohibitionism as means to save society.

MODERN MEMBERS of Alcoholics Anonymous normally distinguish themselves from the old temperance movement by emphasizing that they are against any attempts to effect political change or to produce cultural propaganda.¹ This reaction is not surprising given that the political ambitions of the old temperance movement in the 1920s and 1930s turned out to involve an aggressive and intolerant prohibition movement. It did not solve the basic problems of alcoholism in society, and the defeat of the prohibition policy — at least in Denmark — was for a long time a main obstacle to new temperance activities.²

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1 Klaus Mäkelä *et al.*, *Alcoholics Anonymous as a Mutual-Help Movement: A Study in Eight Societies* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1996).

2 An example of local prohibition activities is the railway town Grindsted. Sidsel Eriksen, "„Something Rotten in Grindsted". Afholdsproblemer i en stationsby" [Something rotten in Grindsted. Alcohol problems in a railway town], *Nyt fra stationsbyen* (Viborg), no. 8 (1985).

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At first sight the old and the new temperance movements seem very different from each other. As described by the American sociologist Joseph Gusfield, the old temperance movement simply arranged a "symbolic crusade" *against* the "bad sides" of modern society. He considered it a cultural movement of the ascetic (and sober), rural, white, Protestant middle class against intemperate urban groups of low status (often ethnically defined) in the population.³ In contrast, Alcoholics Anonymous views itself as an organization of alcoholics based on a programme of mutual help, support, and acceptance of the individual. Were the two faces of the temperance movement originally so different in character? Or are we talking about two separate phases of the lifetime of a temperance movement?

In the debate on the origins and character of the old temperance movement, conclusions have mainly been made from outside and from above on the movement's political and ideological impact on society. We know very little about what happened at the micro level among the members. One relevant question could be what previous relationship the members had to alcohol. It makes a big difference, of course, whether the movement was made up of former alcoholics, intended *for* former alcoholics, or aimed *against* alcoholics. It would also be interesting to know more about which psychological processes took place among the members at the local level.

Archives from local temperance societies are often in poor condition and do not normally make detailed studies possible. An exception is the Thisted Abstinence Society, which left a well-preserved archive including original minute books, registers, and account books. The Thisted Abstinence Society therefore offers us a great opportunity to analyze the micro structure of the temperance movement.

Temperance and Thisted

On October 27, 1883, thirteen residents of Thisted founded a total abstinence society. Before the year was out, 39 people had "taken the pledge". Within a few years the membership of the new Society grew to between 300 and 400, a number which it maintained until the 1930s.

Thisted was a growing and prosperous commercial and industrial town in the northwestern part of Denmark. A port connected the town with a flourishing foreign and national market around the North Sea,



Figure 1 Denmark and Thisted.

and from 1882 the railway effectively linked the community with the rest of the country. From 1850 to 1900 Thisted increased from about 2,300 inhabitants to more than 6,000, and the town continued to grow. The new inhabitants were mostly more or less rootless newcomers from the countryside who had decided to create a new life for themselves in the town. According to the new Abstinence Society, drinking and public houses had increased remarkably while the town was growing, and therefore the Abstinence Society faced the formidable task of opposing the serious consequences of these new drinking habits in the local community.⁴

The Thisted Abstinence Society was one of the first viable local "temperance" (that is, total abstinence) societies in Denmark. The inspiration of the temperance movement came from England and Amer-

3 James R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status, Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

4 [S. Schaltz], "Thisted Afholdforenings Bestyrelse" [The Board of the Thisted Abstinence Society], *Thisted Avis Tidende*, June 22, 1888.

ica via Norway and Sweden and was brought to Denmark by non-conformist missionaries and temperance agitators. Compared with the development in Sweden, England, and the United States, for example, the Danish Lutheran state church and the Lutheran revivalist movements looked at the temperance movement as a "sectarian" one that drew people away from true salvation. This effectively put a brake on the spread of the movement. Only the Danish Abstinence Society (*Danmarks Afholdsforening*), which was a less dogmatic temperance society, could adjust to this Lutheran dominance, while the "pseudo-religious" lodges and the "religious" temperance societies in comparison remained relatively small. About 7 or 8 per cent of the adult population in Denmark was organized in different branches of the Danish temperance movement in the years after the turn of the century.⁵ In spite of lack of support from the religious movements, the Danish temperance movement had reached a remarkable size.

The Thisted Abstinence Society was a local section of the Danish Abstinence Society, the biggest Danish temperance organization, and so was another Abstinence Society represented in the town. Several lodges from the International Order of Good Templars (IOGT) and a Danish splinter organization, the Nordic Independent Order of Good Templars (NIOGT), found small crowds of supporters in Thisted in the last decades of the century. The religious branch of temperance, which included The Blue Ribbon (*Det blå Bånd*) and The Blue Cross (*Blå Kors*), was also represented in Thisted from the 1890s. Thus after the turn of the century a significant number (between 10 and 15 per cent) of the adult population of Thisted were organized as abstainers. This number indicates a pattern in which temperance was more common in new rapidly growing towns in the countryside — like Thisted — where the traditional influence of the state church and its connected movements had weakened and where the labour movement had not yet been able to take root. Without doubt Thisted — and Denmark — had become a part of the world-wide temperance movement.

The Temperance Folk

The Thisted Abstinence Society records contain an almost complete

5 Sidsel Eriksen, "Drunken Danes and Sober Swedes? Religious Revivalism and the Temperance Movements as Keys to Danish and Swedish Folk Cultures", in Bo Stråth, ed., *Language and the Construction of Class Identities. The Struggle for Discursive Power in Social Organisation: Scandinavia and Germany after 1800* (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 1990), pp. 55–94.

listing of those who "took the pledge". Between 1883 and 1892, 1,374 people signed, but many did not maintain their membership. The Society had only 348 (215 men and 133 women) members left in 1892. This large turnover in membership was presumably one of the reasons why the Society's chairman, a clerk named S. J. Schaltz, started a new membership book, where the 348 remaining members were entered. Certainly he also wanted to document for himself — and for the authorities — the good work which had been done in the Abstinence Society. Therefore the information in the new membership book was extremely detailed.

It is hardly surprising that in 1892 the membership included people from all classes: some of the town's journeymen, apprentices, and tradesmen, as well as several independent artisan masters and unskilled labourers. Thus it looked like a microcosm of society. That picture of the Thisted group is not very different from other total abstinence societies in Denmark. The interpretation of the evidence, however, is not so obvious and has caused some discussion: did the artisan masters of the Abstinence Society use the Society to discipline their employees to get a larger output from them, or was it the employees who disciplined themselves by joining the temperance movement on their own initiative because they were the most vulnerable members of society and had great difficulty resisting normal drinking patterns? This question cannot be answered with certainty, because an individual's employment was hardly the only motivation for his participation in the Society. Perhaps the social question has dominated the debate about the rise of the temperance movement simply because employment is often the only information we have about the abstinence folk.⁶

The simple listing of occupations evidently did not satisfy Schaltz's curiosity or his desire for documentation to show the public authorities, from whom he certainly hoped to gain some financial support. The list therefore contains much additional information that provides a more complex view of why an individual decided to participate in the Society.

6 Poul E. Porskær Poulsen, "Afholdsbevægelsen som disciplineringsagent. En skitse til belystning af afholdsbevægelsens ideologi På lokalt plan i Silkeborg og i bevægelsens propaganda." [The temperance movement as an agent of discipline], *Fortid og Nutid*, vol. 32 (1985), pp. 163–182; Inge Bundsgaard and Sidsel Eriksen, "Hvem disciplinerede Hvem? En kommentar til Poul Porskær Poulsens artikel: Afholdsbevægelsen som disciplineringsagent" [Who disciplined whom? A comment on Poul E. Porskær Poulsen's article], *Fortid og Nutid*, vol. 33 (1986), pp. 55–69.

Figure 3 Membership according to profession in the Thisted Abstinence Society. Members with the longest membership are closest to the centre axis.

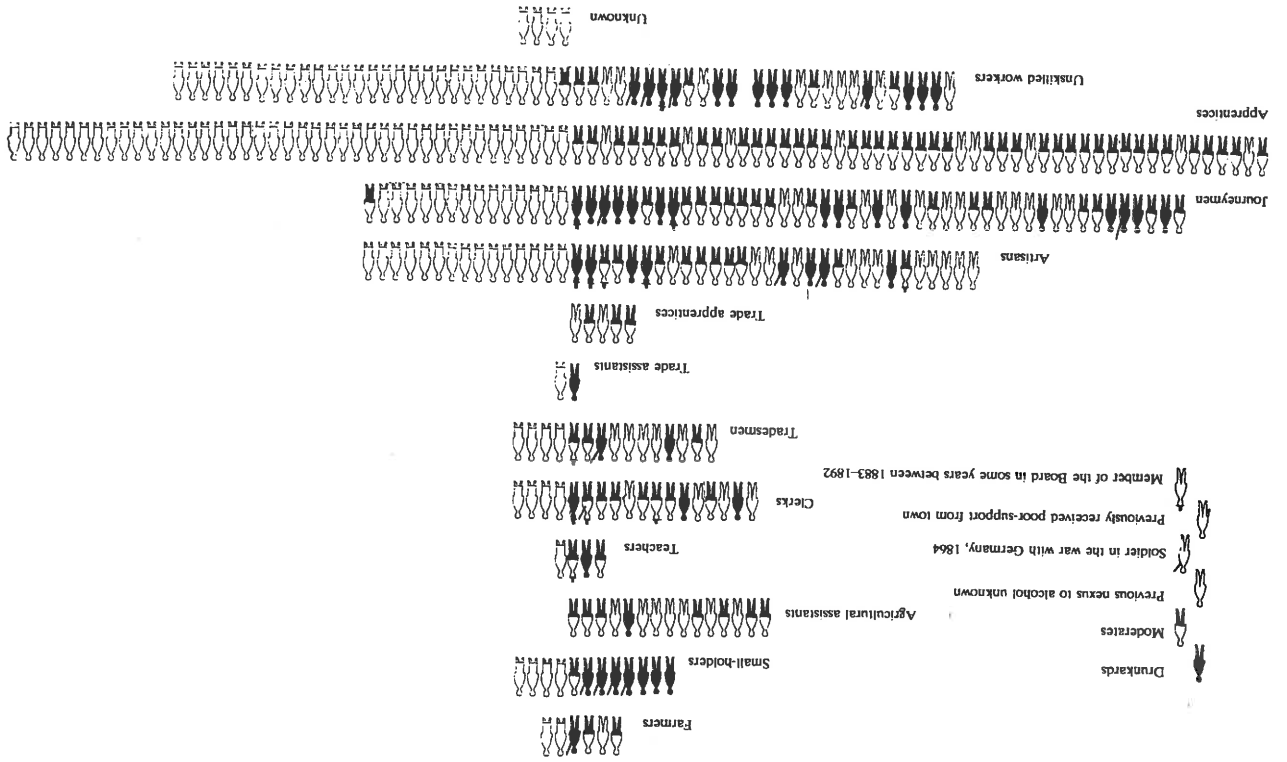
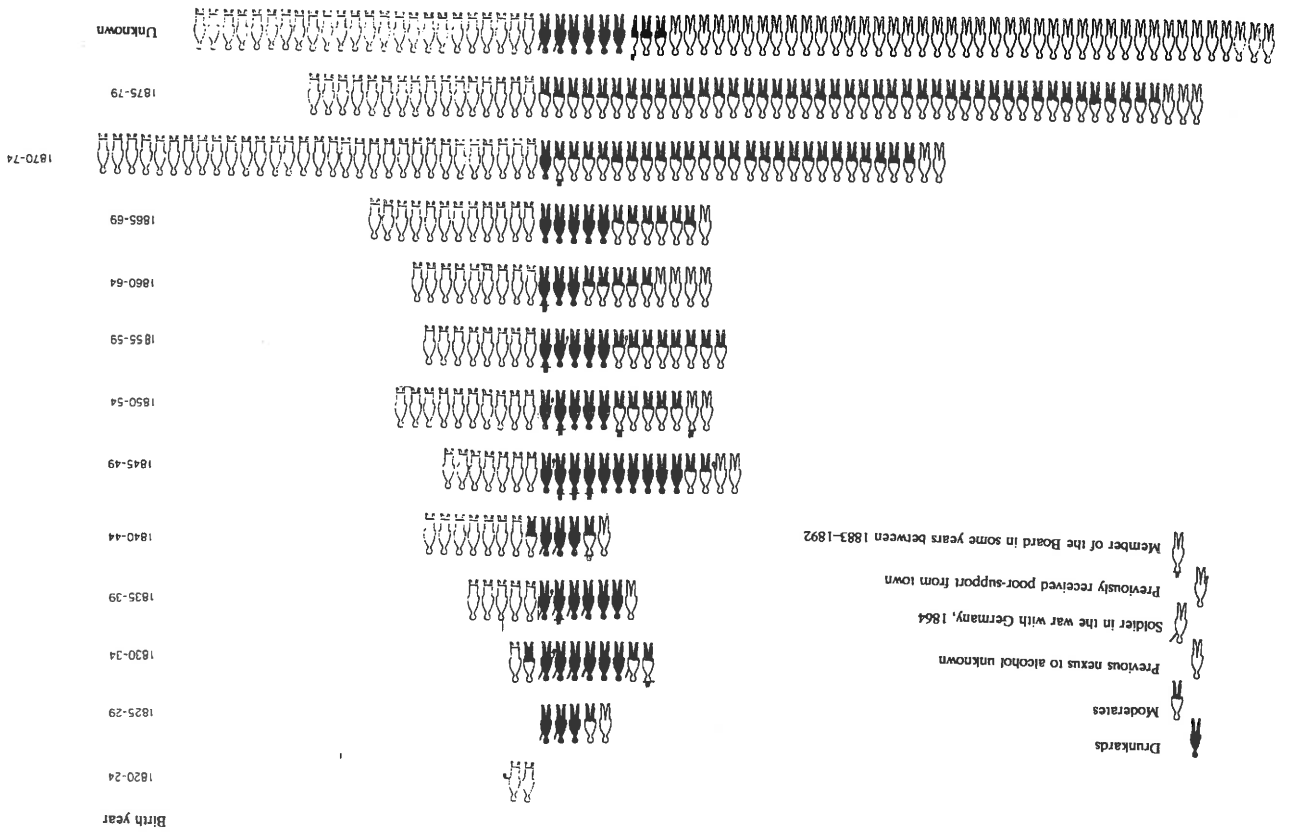


Figure 2 Membership according to age in the Thisted Abstinence Society, 1892.



Schaltz recorded not only the date of inscription of a member, but also the person's address, year of birth, marital status, and whether the person had received poor-law aid, had participated in the war of 1864 as a draftee, had seen active service, and, above all, had had a previous alcohol problem or had been a "moderate" drinker. In addition, Schaltz left room for reporting reasons for the member possibly leaving the Society later!

Of course Schaltz's evaluation of an individual member's relation to temperance was only his own, but there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that he only recorded what he knew personally and what presumably could be checked. Now we, like Schaltz, are in a position to draw a more nuanced picture of the Society's membership in 1892. At first glance, it seems that the number of former drunkards was not great. Ninety-nine of the 348 members (or 46 per cent of male members) described themselves as "moderate" at the time of joining. Only 53 of the 348 said that drunkenness was the reason that they had decided to join. Yet that number comprised 25 per cent of the 215 male members.

There is evidence, however, that the number of members who had previously had problems with alcohol was somewhat larger. Of the 63 people who did not supply any information about their previous relation with alcohol, 22 (or 35 per cent) had previously been expelled from the Society for "breaking their pledge", which at least can be taken as an indication that the lack of information does not mean either moderation or complete abstinence before becoming a member. By comparison, only seven of the 53 who reported earlier problems with alcohol, that is "drunkards", and only two of the 99 who were recorded as "moderate" were later expelled because they broke their pledge — significantly fewer than among those who did not describe their earlier relation to drink.

Many of these previously expelled people who gave no information were independent tradesmen and artisans in particular. Their position in society enabled them to live more easily with high alcohol consumption without a label of being a "drunkard". In spite of their middle-class position, many could be classified as people with weak personal resources, presumably the reason why they wished to remain in the Society.

In spite of a considerable change in membership since 1883, it seems that earlier problems with alcohol were probably a reason for joining, especially for the adult male members of the Society. Of the 39 men born before 1850 and therefore more than 42 years old in 1892, 28 (or 72 per cent) without question had been "drunkards". Of the 88 men

born before 1870, thus more than 22 years old in 1892, 46 (or 52 per cent) had been "drunkards".

If we compare information about previous problems with alcohol with the information about military service in the war with the Germans in 1848 or, more likely, in 1864, we find that, of 51 former soldiers, 23 (or 45 per cent) had been drunkards, proof of what the temperance people often said: the army taught decent people to drink. Even more striking is the fact that, of the 16 members who had seen action in battle, 15 had been drunkards. Therefore more than a quarter of the 53 former alcoholics in the abstinence society had experienced war; they were the Vietnam veterans of Thisted. In a Danish context, there are more examples that veterans from one of the two wars with Germany also were active in the revival movements in the second part of the nineteenth century.⁷

If we consider the social position of the members, former drunkards were to be found at all social levels. Yet the former drunkards were particularly numerous among small-holders or fishermen, unskilled workers, journeymen, and presumably independent artisans, the latter group including many "pledge breakers". Only the younger apprentices and farm servants seem to have been relatively inexperienced with alcohol.

Many married men were members of the Society while their wives were not. There were in fact 133 women members, only two-thirds as many as men. Women did not report any previous experience with alcohol, with the exception of two cases of "moderation", which perhaps means that women did not yet drown their sorrows in alcohol. Neither are there examples of female "drunkards" in the minute books.

Among the middle-aged members who we know had earlier been drunkards, we can see how a woman functioned to support the husband's attempt to deal with his alcohol problem. Forty of the 53 former drunkards were married, and 25 of these had wives who were members in 1892. (It is possible that the remaining 15 wives joined at a later date.) The secondary role of married women is also demonstrated by the fact that, when men resigned or were excluded from the Society, the women also left. Women's membership in the Society can therefore be seen as a matter of solidarity with their husbands, a situation which characterized the Danish temperance movement in general before the

⁷ Anders Subkjær, *Nogle Oplevelser [Some experiences]* (1921); Ole Nygaard, *Min Livsførelse [My conduct of life]* (Skive, 1886).

turn of the century.⁸ In the normal pattern the man became a member first, followed by his wife some months later. From the minute book we also know that the board of the Abstinence Society actively encouraged women to follow their husbands.

Only one married woman, Else Christensen, was a member while her husband was not, but in her case the membership list added, "Her husband has been a member many times in the past, but has broken his pledge."⁹ Her membership may have been an attempt to get her husband to return.

In several cases, however, the drunkard was accompanied not by his wife, but by children or other companions. The teacher Peter Andersen Kappel, who was a drunkard, joined and left the Society several times between 1887 and 1892. Though he was married, it was not his wife who later joined, but his three half-grown children. Similarly the alcoholic Christen Jensen Bach joined with his 16-year-old daughter Jensine Johanne Bach. After a month or so, he was joined by Chresten Stentoft Bach, presumably a brother. Bach's wife, however, did not join.

Occasionally some moderate drinkers joined on the same date as one or several drunkards from the same neighbourhood. This tends to confirm the idea that neighbours or friends, as well as family members, could join to support the one who had problems. At a membership rally in the nearby town, Tingstrup, in 1889, four people signed the pledge. They were the "moderate" drinkers Poul Pedersen, Lars Pedersen (presumably his son), and his daughter Petra Jensen. The fourth was the drunkard Peder Chr. Nielsen Dybdahl, a married small-holder who had participated in the war, who signed the register together with his townsmen, but with a "shaking" hand. His temperate fellow townsmen would probably not have joined except to support him. Poul Pedersen and Peder Chr. Nielsen Dybdahl also resigned from the Society simultaneously in 1893, presumably to form their own local society.¹⁰

Of course it is difficult to prove friendship, feeling of solidarity, or even family support. Yet one can be fairly certain that many of those who reported a problem-free moderation before membership had rela-

8 Sidsel Eriksen, *Søster Silfverbergs Sorger. Historien Om hvordan en søndagsskolelærerinde blev afholdsdaglig og feminist* [Sister Silfverberg's sorrows. A story about how a Sunday school teacher became a temperance agitator and a feminist] (Viborg: SPEKTRUM, 1993).

9 Chairman Schalz's membership list from 1892, member no. 853.

10 *Thisted Afholdsdforening. Løfteprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Register of Pledges], October 6, 1889, nos. 1037, 1038, 1039 and 1040.

tives or close friends who were former drunkards, and that this was an indirect but no less important cause for their participation.

Of the remaining 13 former drunkards, six were widowers and seven were unmarried (bachelors). For these men, family or social support does not seem to have played any particular role in their joining the Society. The Society tried to play the role of a family, gathering them in, whatever their situation. Their prognosis for a future of "temperance" was less hopeful, according to the membership list.

It is clear from the membership list that alcoholism was not a major factor in the decision of young unmarried men to join the Society. They were assistants and apprentices, and virtually all of them replied that they had been "moderate" in their habits. This indicates that they did not join the Thisted Abstinence Society because their employers forced them, in order to limit drinking and therefore increase their efficiency at work, a form of worker discipline.

Only a minority of these young men had masters who were even members of the Society. The master craftsmen in the Society were primarily small-scale artisans with only a few employees, and the number of journeymen and apprentices was a good deal larger than these craftsmen even theoretically could have employed. However, as assumed above, the masters largely joined the Abstinence Societies for personal reasons. The young people therefore joined the Society for other reasons, presumably — as we shall see below — to get into respectable and sober company in the town.

It is clear, however, that if a master were a member, his family and employees were usually also members. Master-baker Harkjær's family was fully represented, for example, as were his journeyman and apprentice, possibly as a condition of their employment. The pledge of abstinence required one not only to abstain from the use of alcohol oneself, but also not to support traditional drinking patterns. A master could therefore not consistently be a member of the Society and at the same time permit alcohol to be used within his household. When shoemaker Hans Rasmussen had a lodger in his household who "demanded a beer with his meal", the Board of the Abstinence Society advised Rasmussen to get a temperate lodger as soon as his current tenant moved out of the house "so that there would not be any more bottles of lager there".¹¹ A temperate master therefore would only have hired "temperate" employees

11 *Thisted Afholdsdforening. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], June 8, 1886.

from his own Abstinence Society. There is evidence that the Abstinence Society also functioned as an employment centre for temperate labour.

Only one example showed the Abstinence Society directly as an instrument of discipline for an employer. Journeyman and sailmaker Johan Chr. Weil, who had previously been a member, reapplied for membership "after urging from his principal". The master does not appear to have belonged to the Society, however. In this case, it seems that the master simply wanted the Society to make a well-behaved journeyman out of Weil, but did not want his own behaviour limited.¹²

In many ordinary workplaces, "temperance" was hardly welcomed. There could be a problem if, for instance, a journeyman or apprentice refused, because of his pledge, to get beer or *snaps* for his superiors. He would be disturbing the drinking habits in the workplace. The difficulty could be worse for abstainers in retail shops. They could not, according to their pledge, sell or serve alcohol to their customers.¹³ This type of employee was therefore under-represented in the Abstinence Society according to the 1892 membership list. A purchasing agent in 1897 sought a special dispensation from the Society because he had to allow his suppliers to drink in connection with buying and selling. This meant that, in spite of his own desires, he could not hold to his pledge. He was accepted by the Society on the condition that he would not personally serve liquor to his suppliers.¹⁴

Some of the young members can be identified as grown or near-grown sons and daughters of older members. Others had doubtless moved to the town at a young age. Possibly, they also were children of abstainers, who simply wanted a sober gathering place in the town. They were the Society's second generation.

The evidence indicates several motivations for joining the Society and taking the pledge. A good number became members because they drank; many became members to support the first group. Some, too few in the view of the temperance group, joined for purely ideological reasons. The rest, mostly younger members, joined to avoid becoming drunks.

¹² *Ibid.*, February 16, 1889. According to the Thisted Abstinence Society's register of pledges, Weil was admitted to the Society as no. 949 on February 14, 1889. He must have left the Society before 1892; in any case, he did not appear in Schaltz's list of 1892.

¹³ *Portemager* [potter] Jens Nielsen, "Afholdsmand som Opvarter?" [Abstinent people as waiters?], *Sjæerne*, October 1895, pp. 103-105.

¹⁴ *Thisted Afholdsförening. Förhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], March 8, 1897.

Leadership of the Thisted Abstinence Society

While social status was an important qualification for leadership in the Thisted Abstinence Society, as in other societies, a background of alcoholism was still more important. Of the 13 listed in 1892 as current or past members of the Board of Directors, only six had been moderate drinkers, while seven had been drunkards. Among the members of the Board, the former drunkards were the most important.

This was particularly true in the case of the man who was chairman of the society for many years, J. S. Schaltz. Schaltz had been an active soldier in the war of 1864 and had been a drunkard before he joined the Society. He therefore knew the relevant questions when he designed the membership questionnaire in 1892. Two other important members of the Board, the blacksmiths C. Dysted and Anton Larsen, had also been heavy drinkers. These Board members had overcome their own alcoholism through membership in the Society, and that seems to have been the motivation for their involvement in temperance work. Thus they were not original spokesmen for "the middle class", but rather enlightened representatives of former drunkards.

Similarly, some of the moderate drinkers in the leadership had relatives who were drunkards. Even the idealistic teacher M. S. Andersen, who became chairman in 1897, likely was moved to join the Society through his friendship with his alcoholic colleague, Kappel.

In support of the work of the leadership was a large group of long-standing members, some of whom had been among the first members of the Abstinence Society. They formed the core of the older or middle-aged cohort. Many of these were also former drunkards or "tried and true temperance men".¹⁵

As in the modern Alcoholics Anonymous, personal experience with the dangers of alcohol was therefore an important motivating force in the Thisted Abstinence Society, at least in the first decades of its existence. The "natural" elite of the town, ministers, or teachers (except Andersen) were, on the other hand, conspicuous by their absence. The leaders of the Thisted Abstinence Society came, in more than one meaning, from "below".

Cultural Battles

The leading temperance folk were not happy that the natural elite of the town did not support abstinence activities. They were convinced that it

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, January 13, 1889.

was important to have opinion leaders involved with the temperance cause if it were to have any meaning and be attractive in the local community. The Abstinence Society put forth "a programme of education" which was in fact an extension of the purposes of a philanthropic organization for people of humble means called the Thisted Workingmen's Society (*Thisted Arbejderforening*) founded in 1868. The original idea was to help workers learn to improve the conditions of their lives. According to the Workingmen's Society, this was possible if one pulled oneself together, used time well, acquired skills, saved money and in general planned for the future, took care of one's health, and had some sense of responsibility for one's neighbour. Such a strategy is often connected with "middle-class values".

Such "middle-class values" of self-education, self-improvement, self-discipline, and self-development encouraged self-respect, which was itself a help in temperance work. Self-respect made it possible to turn the negative energy of drunkenness into something more positive and enabled the individual to raise himself up from the oppressive weight of drink and to attain a footing of equality with his fellows.¹⁶ Temperance activity was therefore a cultural project to change or eliminate an unsatisfactory self-image.

The major difference, of course, was that, for temperance people, drink and the culture of the pub had to be rejected if self-improvement were to have any meaning. According to temperance supporters, only an Abstinence Society enabled people — not only drunkards, but also moderate drinkers — to do better in society: in work, school, and family. Only through membership in the Abstinence Society could one also overcome all degrading class discrimination and make oneself a better life — or even be promoted to the "next class".

In interpreting the ideology of temperance, one must note that temperance folk emulated and wanted to attain the same standard of well-being and culture as the well-to-do people and to gain respect from that group. The attempt to achieve equality with the prosperous was an indication that the temperance campaign was characterized by a devotion to "middle-class values". But the temperance people wanted to be a better "middle class" than the middle class.

Through an emphasis — perhaps an over-emphasis — on these values, temperance supporters wanted to refute the impression that the

Abstinence Society was for unstable and uncultivated people with a weak character or who simply came from poor and miserable families. That sort of label, whether justified or not, was hardly a help for someone who had decided to take the pledge of total abstinence.

In view of the serious purposes of its educational work, it was a source of bitterness to the Society that neither the economic nor bureaucratic elite gave this work the respect which the Society thought it deserved. Members of the local elite accepted the work of the Society, but they did not join themselves. Only if the respectable classes "with all [their] ability and energy began to work in Temperance ranks" would their support of the temperance movement be meaningful, declared the Thisted Abstinence Society in the local newspaper *Thisted Amts Tidende*.¹⁷

Temperance folk, therefore, were conscious of the distance between the values they practised and the practice of the bourgeoisie. Schaltz even accused those well-to-do people who opposed Temperance Societies of tempting the weak into bad habits with their drinking patterns and bad examples. He attacked "in the camp of the enemy" in underscoring that drink could easily become a problem among the "moderate" drinkers of the well-to-do or well-educated themselves, and that they therefore had as much need for the temperance movement as anyone else. The border between controlled drinking and uncontrolled drunkenness was not clear. A "moderate drinker" with a little secret drinking on the side could easily become a drunkard. The well-to-do drinker could not or would not see the great danger he and his family were in when they continued to allow alcohol in their home. The enlightened temperance folk could tell them about that!

Many stories in the Abstinence Society's local newspaper, *Sjærnien* (The Star) dealt with typical themes, such as how a well-behaved young lady, married to a promising young farmer's son who had nothing against a good time at the pub, ended as a drunkard's wife a decade later, when her "promising" husband had lost the farm through drink. Or how a journeyman carpenter (a member of an Abstinence Society, of course) rescued his master from too much drink by persuading him to join the Society.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hans Jensen, "Svar til en Afholdtsven" [Answer to a friend of abstinence], *Thisted Amts Tidende*, February 25, 1895.

¹⁸ *Sjærnien*. *Medlemsblad for Afholdtsforeningerne i Thy og paa Hanneas*, 1894–1905; Kerstin Rydbeck, "Högläsningslitteraturen som formidlare av ideologi och samhällssyn inom IOGT:s ungdomsorganisation 1909–20" [Literature for reading aloud as a communicator of ideology] in Anders Gustavsson, ed., *Alkohol och nykterhet* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1989).

¹⁶ Ronny Ambjörnsson, *Den skitsamme arbetaren* [The respectable worker] (Stockholm: Carlssons Bokförlag, 1988).

"Moderate" drinking therefore carried a negative, almost hypocritical connotation in the movement. Moderate drinking was a bad excuse for people who were not able to give it up. As well, moderate drinkers, according to the abstinent people, usually had a dubiously wide frame for what amount of drinks could be deemed "moderate". Abstinent people were "the wise ones" who dared to recognize the problem, to look the enemy straight in the eye and take the consequences: that is, to sign the pledge and join the Society.

It was a great and even a hypocritical paradox for temperate people that the ministers of the dominant Danish State Church used theological reasons to justify their refusal to become members of the local temperance society. According to clerical interpretation of Lutheran theology, one did not need temperance societies and prohibition if one really believed in God: true belief would (automatically) make the individual a better and balanced person without any risk of becoming a drunkard. It was not a wholly convincing argument to the abstainers. Rather they saw it as evidence that ministers would not or, more precisely, could not give up their private use of alcohol. To support the Society was thus both an ideological and, more concretely, much too great a personal challenge for the ministers. The abstainers in Thisted therefore decided that they did not need any support from people who could not help themselves. Given this line of reasoning, the Thisted Abstinence Society seems even more a genuine self-help movement.

The debate in the temperance movement threw doubt on the integrity of a bourgeois education and upbringing. What actually was it worth, if it rested on the false basis of drink? Temperance culture, in fact that of total abstinence, was the only culture that was genuine and durable.¹⁹ Being well-off could lead to decadence. According to the local temperance journal in 1899,

[when] people do not need to work hard to earn their daily bread, it is not spiritual strength that emerges, but most often the darker forces. The spirit is choked off and people approach the bestial and are destroyed. Hard physical labour is the best school for a firm will and self control, and that

19 Henrik Berggren, "Workers' Education and Representations of Class in the Swedish Labour Movement, 1900-1939", in Bo Stråth, ed., *Language and the Construction of Class Identities*, p. 471. Berggren states that the Swedish labour movement, strongly influenced by the temperance ideology, interpreted the temperance culture as having moral values higher than those of bourgeois education.

which takes place in the open air is as good for the soul as it is necessary for the body.²⁰

It seems therefore that the temperance campaign was also a campaign against the dominant culture and the middle class. The temperance movement sought to redefine what culture and good upbringing really were, to chart a new direction toward a civilized way of life and higher moral values. Thus the temperance movement was a counter-culture, with conviction and self-confidence which also — and this was the point — made its aims attainable. The relationship to the well-to-do among the moderate drinkers was characterized by admiring and adapting to their standards, and at the same time by keeping them at a distance and struggling against them. The evaluation of this counter-culture must consist of gauging the degree to which it succeeded in altering the dominant culture from below.

An Abstinent Community Centre

Alcohol misuse in Thisted was, according to the temperate folk, a destructive consequence of modern society. The flight into the protective and relatively inviolable fellowship of a pub was perhaps also an attempt to drive away thoughts of unfulfilled hopes in the life outside its doors. Therefore, one had to build an alternative alcohol-free milieu, a little ideal society, not directly in the city centre of Thisted, but in a side street at the edge of town. There the utopia of an abstinent society could be realized and could grow.

The building began in 1884, with the work of abstainer and bricklayer Chr. Olsen, and was finished in the spring of 1885. It included a dance hall, smaller meeting rooms, a billiard room, and a bowling alley (*keglebane*). The core of the building was a so-called "restaurant" where only alcohol-free drinks were served. There all could meet, whether or not they were members, have a chat, and possibly find a card game. To give young people a place to "hang out", the Board of Directors decided in 1885 to keep the Abstinence House open and heated. Gymnastic equipment, chess sets, dominos, checkers, books, and newspapers were provided.²¹

20 Sparrevohn, "Det legemlige Arbejde" [Manual work], *Sjæstern. Medlemsblad for Afholdelsesforeningerne i Thy og paa Hanneæs*, January 1899, pp. 148-150.

21 *Thisted Afholdelsesforening. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], December 3, 1885.

Ultimately, it was not possible to compete with the pubs in town. If the milieu in the Abstinence House was too close to the culture of the pub, then it would not give members any new experiences. If the "Abstinence House" was too different from other gathering places, it became irrelevant and boring for those who needed it most. No matter how much it tried to approach the culture of the pub, it was not at all the same thing. As one member put it: "I dare say that in many ways a pub seems much more attractive [*hyggeligere*] than the Thisted Abstinence House during a Monday meeting." The statement was aimed at excessive smoking at the Monday meetings, which of course resulted in a clear smell of pub culture.²² There was nothing to do about that. But it was undoubtedly to escape being infected with the symbol of drinking culture that the board did even not allow alcohol-free wine to be served in the Abstinence House.²³

Card playing was the most important part of pub culture which was imported into the temperance home. True, playing cards could not possibly be a danger to the sober, but, ever-watchful for evil, the Society from the very start forbade playing cards for money, so that there would be no danger of wasting anything but time. Schaltz himself was a leading voice. He persuaded the Society to forbid any sort of card playing on Sunday between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. He put his chairmanship on the line to ensure that the regulation was followed, and the membership clearly respected that.

What is interesting is that Schaltz did not base his arguments on the well-being of the members, but on an attempt to make the Society acceptable to the more cultivated groups in the town. He thought that sympathy for the Society, which was in many ways growing among outsiders, would be lost. Schaltz was probably thinking of how people would react if, on Sunday morning, the good bourgeois went to church while temperance folk were playing cards in the Abstinence House. Yet he pointed out that the Society should not drop one popular and attractive activity without replacing it with something better. Schaltz criticized the Board, which he had recently left, because members did not open "up the library at the same time they shut down card-playing".²⁴

22 Jens Jespersen, "Tobaksrygning under Mandagsmøderne i Thisted Afholdshjem" [Smoking at the Monday meetings in the Thisted Abstinence Home], *Sjæerne*, 1895, pp. 75–76.

23 *Thisted Afholdsforsamling. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], July 31, 1886.

24 *Ibid.*, February 24, 1884; S. Schaltz, "Thisted Afholdsforsamling" [Thisted Abstinence Society], *Dansk Afholdsbld*, September 6, 1889, p. 283.

A library was from the start an important part of Schaltz's goals and those of his faithful follower, the smith Anton Larsens. There members could soak up knowledge during the long winter evenings. The Abstinence Society could not afford to buy books, of course, but luckily there was a good chance to be given books from such organizations as the Society for the Furtherance of the Education of the People (*Førelæsen til Folkeoplysningens fremme*) or the Society for Distribution of Religious Tracts (*Samfundet for Gudelige Smaaskrifters udbredelse*). The Temperance Society also had good contacts with Thisted citizens, including the local bookdealer and the town's teachers. The Thisted Reading Society (*Thisted Læseforening*) gave used books to the Abstinence House which, said Schaltz, "could be a guarantee that the books had good things in them". The library would not accept political literature, however.²⁵

In order that the restrictions on card playing should not drive people to the pub, Schaltz in 1891 proposed at a debate in the Abstinence House that "a member will be considered to have broken his pledge if he goes to a pub or plays cards with people who drink alcohol during the game." This proposal set off a long discussion which ended with the resolution that such action would not mean breaking one's pledge, but that the pledge was not 100 per cent followed — the member was not "not perfectly pure".²⁶ Accordingly, members could continue to visit the pub.

Schaltz developed his thoughts about the importance of the Abstinence House with numerous discussions in the Society. He considered that being a Temperance Man was a process threatened by forces which could lead to veering from virtue, and that in holding to the right course the Abstinence House played a significant role. For example, if temperance folk met on the street and began to talk of perhaps having a cup of coffee, the one who said they should go to the Abstinence House would be a better temperance man than the one who suggested an ordinary pub.

25 *Thisted Afholdsforsamling. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], October 18, 1884; February 20, March 20, and May 8, 1886; August 2 and October 23, 1890; February 4, 1896; "Thisted Afholdsforsamling" [Thisted Abstinence Society], *Thisted Amts Tidende*, March 19, 1887; "Fra Thisted Afholdsforsamling" [From the Thisted Abstinence Society], *Thisted Amts Tidende*, January 30, 1888; "Værdifuld Gave" [A valuable gift], *Sjæerne*, 1897, p. 120.

26 *Thisted Afholdsforsamling. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], April 6, 1891.

Another member, however, wondered whether "one could also benefit the movement by going to an ordinary place, and showing people that you could have a little something without having to have alcohol". According to the local temperance newspaper, "this method of benefiting the movement did not find any support" but was heartily rejected by Schaltz, who thought that, from his experience, the pub should simply not be a part of temperance folks' reality.²⁷ Farmer Ole Thøgersen proposed as a compromise that "Temperance folk would not be harmed by coming into a public inn", but they absolutely ought not to *klunk* with others or in general take part in the social activity around drinking. Opinions were often divided, but it is notable that the problems of the relationship between the Abstinence House and the pubs could lead to intense debate only in the Abstinence House, isolated from the outside world.²⁸

From 1884 on, the activities of the members were centred in the weekly "Monday Meetings", with readings and stories in temperance newspapers or tracts, little talks, songs, and naturally discussions. The Board members managed these evenings in turn and we know that, especially at the beginnings, there was a lively interest in them. The number attending was regularly noted in the minutes and it was not unusual to have 50 or 60 members present.²⁹

Temperance speakers also came from other places. They told of their experiences with alcohol, their own earlier lives, and the blessings of abstinence. Among these travelling temperance speakers (often the most active) were those associated with Christian denominations other than the State (Lutheran) Church. The Abstinence House, in fact, became in the 1880s and beginning of the 1890s a centre for these sectarian preachers who periodically visited the area.

People came to meetings in the Abstinence House, but temperance folk had difficulty, at least at first, in giving their counter-culture a content which could provide their case with the strength and understanding it needed to change drinking patterns. The problem was surely that the content of the meetings was too undefined. Temperance folk fun-

²⁷ "Diskussionsmøde" [Debate], *Sjernerne. Medlemsblad for Afholdsföreningerne i Thy og paa Hanneas*, April 1894, p. 14.

²⁸ "Afholdsfolks Forhold til Udenforstaaende" [Abstinence people's relation to non-abstainers], *Sjernerne. Medlemsblad for Afholdsföreningerne i Thy og paa Hanneas*, September 1896, pp. 81–83.

²⁹ *Thisted Afholdsförening. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], November 30, 1889.

damentally had only a negative cultural definition — alcoholic drink should be dropped — and they had difficulty shaping a new temperance identity. To strengthen the weekly assemblies in the Abstinence House Chairman Schaltz had to find something to keep abstainers together. Therefore he started to communicate with the Grundtvigian movement and invited its followers to take part in the meetings.

The Grundtvigian movement derived its name from N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), a minister and poet, who became a prominent figure in nineteenth-century Danish peasant culture. The Grundtvigian movement was the biggest Danish revivalist movement. Its main idea was to convert people to a special Nordic (and Lutheran) brand of Christianity by encouraging them to read and learn about Danish history, culture, democracy, and society and by making them believe in their responsibility and ability to create a new society in their own environment on the basis of extensive societal freedom for the individual.

This contact meant — in spite of Schaltz's good intentions — that the cultural work in many of the local societies belonging to the Danish Abstinence Society became dependent on the well-established, well-to-do, and eventually culturally dominant Grundtvigian movement, even though the latter did not include temperance in its programme. Of course the new partnership would not mean that abstainers would start to drink, but to a great extent the Thisted Abstinence Society (as the larger part of the Danish temperance movement) culturally became simply a subordinate — but temperate — part of the Grundtvigians' sphere. This became especially apparent when the abstinent teacher M. S. Andersen became chairman and worked for the promotion of a Grundtvigian identity among members of the Abstinence Society. In the long run abstainers thereby lost their sense of independence and cultural superiority. Of course, some Grundtvigians became interested in the temperance question and therefore changed their drinking habits, but this did not happen to any overwhelming extent.

This makes an interesting contrast to neighbouring Sweden, where the temperance movement had attained an independent and dominating position in spreading popular enlightenment and education within the local society — the same position in the public mind as the Grundtvigians had in Denmark. Temperance people and the temperance culture in Sweden in general were much more accepted.

The Unstable Members

Even though the Thisted Abstinence Society had developed more or less

as a sober and well-behaved milieu, there were still members who were not completely "dry". From Schaltz's list of 1892, 121 persons (83 men and 39 women) of the 348 left the Society within a few years, and in each case the cause was noted. We can see that 31 men and no women were expelled because they had broken their pledge, 36 had "resigned" or were simply "removed" for being in arrears, and another 36 had moved away. (Fourteen of these had joined a Temperance Society in their new place of residence.) Five members had died and 13 had emigrated to America. The high number of emigrants shows that the Abstinence Society maintained close relations ideologically and personally to its American roots,³⁰ but also that it recruited members from the more mobile, younger, unmarried groups in society. An old member, watchmaker Heede, emigrated to the United States and from his letters to the Abstinence Society we know he became a promoter of the idea of emigration.³¹ Even the chair of the Society, carpenter J. Jensen (Schaltz's successor from 1894 to 1896), emigrated to America.³²

In a Society built upon the common purpose of eliminating alcohol, an irresponsible attitude on the part of some members created problems. "Some members drank in secret, others have done it openly and are nevertheless still members of the Society, because first people thought they could improve, and also that the Society should not in any way decline in membership," said one critic who underscored that it was important to keep the Society on the "straight and narrow path".³³ It was undoubtedly bad publicity for the Society if members were seen in town at pubs and did not limit themselves to card playing and alcohol-free ale, while claiming that they were temperance folk. The problem was that Board members could not observe this behaviour, especially if they, like Schaltz, would not go into pubs themselves.

The rules were therefore revised in 1885 to state that every member had a duty to inform the Board of Directors if he or she had knowledge of another member breaking the pledge. After that, the Board could take

up the matter and perhaps exclude the member from the Society and take away his Temperance Star. If the former member would not give it up, the Board received the authority to publish the person's name in the town newspaper. Wearing the Star of Temperance had to be maintained, for the larger world, as a true sign of being an abstainer.³⁴

Was it wise for the Board consistently to exclude those who were known to be drinking in spite of their pledge, with the possible result of driving them further into the world of drink? Or should the Board have ignored light drinking in hope that the Society could, in the long run, keep the "sinner" on an even keel? Neither of these alternatives seemed acceptable. From 1886 on, it was agreed that members who broke their pledge would be asked to come before the Board and explain the situation. The idea was not simply to readmit the person, but to underline, above all, how serious the problem was for the individual in question and for others. If the person did not appear, exclusion was the automatic consequence.³⁵

Talking with "sinners" became almost a standard agenda item at Board meetings, where the sinners were threatened with expulsion if they could not in the future refrain from using alcohol. The Society tried to make the exclusion conditional and to re-accept the member, but on a trial basis.³⁶ The Board members, especially those who had previous problems with alcohol themselves, acted as contact people for members in trouble, seeking them out and trying to find solutions to their problems. If there were signs of remorse and promises to do better, the member usually was given another chance. In 1893, for example, the Board talked with three members who had broken their pledge. They were "allowed to remain in the Society, since they promised to be faithful members in the future". There was general agreement that another member should be readmitted "since he very much desired it", but only after Chairman Schaltz had given him "a fatherly admonition".³⁷

We can see the seriousness of the matter when in 1896 the Board considered the case of butcher Flint, who turned himself in to the chair-

30 Kristian Hvidt, *Flugten til Amerika eller Drivkræfter i massevandringen fra Danmark 1868-1914* [The exodus to America or the motives in the mass emigration from Denmark 1868-1914] (Århus: Jysk Selskab for Historie, 1971), pp. 282-300.

31 "Thisted Afholdssforening" [Thisted Abstinence Society], *Thisted Amts Tidende*, February 11, 1890.

32 *Thisted Afholdssforening. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], February 21, 1906.

33 J. Jespersen, "Fremad paa ny!" [Forward again!], *Sjæerne*, 1894, p. 22.

34 *Thisted Afholdssforening. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], July 6, 1885.

35 *Ibid.*, March 27, 1886.

36 *Ibid.*, July 6, 1885; *Danmarks Afholdssblad*, February 4, 1887.

37 *Thisted Afholdssforening. Forhandlingsprotokol* [Thisted Abstinence Society. Minutes], August 1 and September 14, 1886; November 9, 1889; August 29, 1893.

man, carpenter Jensen, as a "drunk". Remorse in this case also led to mercy, but Flint could not, as it turned out, keep his pledge.³⁸

Many times the patience of the experienced temperance folk was sorely tried in a way that only someone with personal experience of alcoholism could have tolerated. In 1887 the Board did not want to exclude two other members who had drunk alcohol and allow them, as the minutes reported, to be destroyed. Instead, they were required to attend a "Monday Meeting" where they would receive a sharp scolding and were to give up their Temperance Stars and membership cards. These would be given back after three months if they, in the meantime, had shown themselves to be dependable members.

Only one, bricklayer Niels Christensen, appeared. He delivered his badge and membership card and received an admonition from the chairman in the presence of other Board members. The chairman himself had to visit the other. Before the trial period was over, Niels Christensen proved unable to hold to his pledge, and therefore it was decided to expel him.³⁹

It was not much better for shoemaker S. Nielsen, who requested readmittance in March 1887. The Board decided to readmit him, but on a trial basis until May. He could not control himself for that long a time. Within a week after the trial period had begun, the Board got word that he had been drinking again, and therefore he was finally expelled. The shoemaker's strong desire to join the fellowship of the Society is demonstrated by the fact that as early as April he applied again for readmission. The Society's wish to remain consistent meant that he was refused because he was "very undependable". In June he was readmitted on a trial basis for two months, but in July the Board finally decided to exclude him because he could not keep from drinking even during the trial period.⁴⁰ Only once was a person's name printed in the local paper, when dairyman M. Nielsen was expelled and would not deliver his star or membership card.⁴¹

It is obvious that the threat of expulsion from the good company in the Abstinence Society in the end was an undesirable procedure used as a last resort or if the person simply did not want to remain a member.

38 *Ibid.*, April 14, 1896.

39 *Ibid.*, February 12, April 18 and 24, 1887.

40 *Ibid.*, March 19 and 26, April 12 and 23, June 11, and July 30, 1887.

41 *Ibid.*, February 23, 1898.

The Quiet Work

We can see from many examples in the minutes that by no means could all of the problems of drunkenness and alcohol misuse be solved through the fellowship of the Temperance Society and the threat of expulsion. The Board discussed on many occasions replacing the rather old-fashioned "pledge", thereby making the Society more open for outsiders. Schaltz himself strongly supported retaining the pledge. Presumably influenced by his own experience with temperance work in Thisted, he maintained that "Many people have felt themselves strengthened by the pledge: they have got the strength from it to resist the evil which often, and frequently without success, they have tried to conquer."⁴² In practical terms the pledge was the only means that the Society could use against alcohol.

Schaltz tried, however, to deal with the problem somewhat more systematically, hence the 1892 list. It seemed as if the Abstinence Society had unintentionally identified a group of drinkers who could not benefit from its cultural programme. In the 1892 list we find 28 people who had already been in and out of the Society one or more times. This was a group of unstable members whom the Society seemed unable to help. They clearly wanted to be in the Society but could not manage to keep their promise. They were all men; fifteen were married, eight were unmarried, four were widowers, and one member's marital status is unknown. Nineteen were listed as "drunkards" before they became members (also afterwards) and five were described as "moderate". The group of "unstable personalities" was actually somewhat larger, because the 1892 list did not include those that were, for the moment, expelled (for various reasons) or were members of other Temperance Societies, but who wanted to rejoin the Thisted Society.

In the long run, it was not satisfactory simply to exclude the weak, for whom, after all, the Society had been created. Chairman Schaltz therefore began a programme of care, called the "Quiet Work", for the heavily burdened members who had been abandoned by the Society. To participate in the "Quiet Work" one had to have earlier "used strong drink to excess" and had to promise never to partake of any sort of refreshments at a pub. The "Quiet Work" took place in homes, where attempts were made to "persuade the wives to forget their husband's past". That was not always easy, but Schaltz believed that "good will and love" could be a great help. Schaltz clearly considered this a per-

42 *Ibid.*, July 6, 1885.

sonal mission to those who had been excluded from the group, perhaps a parallel to spiritual counselling in the church.⁴³ From 1894 Schaltz decided to use all his time in the "Quiet Work".

This more intensive care was meant for those who were on their way out of the Society. The character of the "Quiet Work" was similar to that of Alcoholics Anonymous (and possibly closer to the functions of the Thisted Abstinence Society in its first days). By separating the hard "salvage" work from the rest of its activities, the Society could make salvation more intense and at the same time ensure that remaining members no longer would be confronted with the reality of alcoholic behaviour in their abstinent cultural milieu, nor would they continue to be viewed as alcoholics by the rest of society. This had a crucial consequence for the Society. When the first generation of former drunkards had disappeared from the core of the Abstinence Society, the active rescue work among drinkers slowly disappeared too.

Perspectives

Like the modern Alcoholics Anonymous (and Al Anon), the old temperance society in Thisted was, at least in the beginning, a self-help group of people with few resources, who were joined by their relatives, neighbours, and colleagues. The activities in the self-help group must be seen as the members' mutual efforts to change their attitudes to life away from the false drinking culture towards new perspectives.

The study of the Thisted Abstinence Society demonstrates the development of the abstinent culture. When the first generation of members had stopped drinking, the Abstinence Society changed its character from a society whose main idea was to make or to keep its members sober to a society without alcohol where sober people with new middle-class aspirations could gather and engage in creative activities in a non-drinking atmosphere. The new members of the Abstinence Society in Thisted were not drunkards but young abstainers looking for a sober milieu. Therefore they distanced themselves from the identity of the drunkards and later also from the work among drunkards.

This separation set the stage for the Abstinence Society to change its strategy from a tolerant self-help movement working for abstinence

among individuals to an intolerant movement working to make all of society as sober and safe as its members were. The Abstinence House simply tried to broaden its sphere of influence to the larger society, and its activities therefore turned first to active propaganda for the promotion of a temperate culture and, when this failed, to an aggressive propaganda campaign for a prohibition policy. Therefore the temperance movement was identified with an idealistic or perhaps ideological and fanatical movement trying to spread its own values to the rest of society. The Abstinence Society thus became much closer to what Joseph Gusfield viewed as temperance ideas.

The unintended result of the change in the self-image of the Danish temperance movement was that rescue work among alcoholics was gradually overlooked until new abstinence societies would arise from below, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (and Al Anon) in the 1980s. In its refusal to embrace political and cultural aims, Alcoholics Anonymous has perhaps learned from the old abstinence societies that distancing itself from the "identity of alcoholics" will divert the movement from its original task.

43 *Ibid.*, October 29, 1894; February 4, 1895; "Danmarks Afholdsforenings Aarsmøde i Fredericia den 9., 10. og 11. Juli 1895" [The annual meeting of the Danish Abstinence Society], *Beretning Om Danmarks Afholdsforenings Virksomhed i dens 15. Regnskabsaar fra 1. April 1894 til 31 Marts, 1895*, pp. 33–37.